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EPS Support Staff Are Vital to School's Operation

Michael Kaiser

All support staff members like custodians, cooks, and bus drivers are vital to the operation of a school district. Just like teachers, support staff members contribute to the educational experience of our students on a daily basis.

What makes bus driving unique is that they transport our most precious cargo - our community's children. They are the first ones to greet our children in the morning and make sure the trip to school is a safe one in all kinds of road and weather conditions.

While school bus drivers do their best watching out for our children, it takes a community effort. Motorists need to always stop when a school bus driver activates the flashing lights and when the crossing arm is fully extended.

Ellendale Public School District has an

excellent team of bus drivers that are committed to serving students and families. They know their role impacts a child's life every single day. A huge thank you to all of our bus drivers and substitute bus drivers!

Ellendale School is always looking for substitute bus drivers. It's a difficult position to fill due to the nature of the position. It's a "split shift" and drivers don't earn money when school is not in session. Still it's a popular option for retirees and maybe a good fit for stay-at-home parents and college kids. Some days when there are multiple activity trips it is difficult to find substitute drivers for all of the regular bus routes. We really are facing a critical shortage and the district is working on creative solutions. If anyone is interested in becoming a substitute bus driver they should contact the school or apply online at www.ellendale.k12.nd.us.

Aberdeen Area Arts Leader to Speak at Ellendale Area Arts Council Annual Meeting January 25th

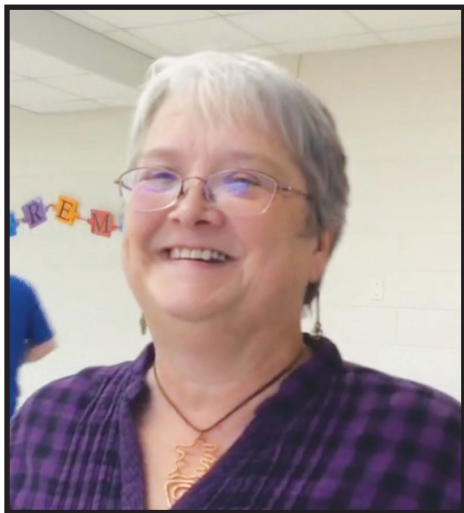
By Ken Smith

"My philosophy for creating is, 'well, what can I do with this; or, this reminds me of this, or, let's have some fun!' I was always an imaginative and inventive kid! When my dad renovated an old schoolhouse into our home, I would visit the junk-pile of heating radiators, pipe, plumbing and etc. and make stuff out of it. One time I made a miniature golf course to cover the entire acre of back yard we had!"

Lois Beckner is a Pennsylvania native who came to Aberdeen in 1988 and went right to work in promoting her passion for the arts. She became the Cultural Arts Program Coordinator for the ARCC (Aberdeen Recreation & Cultural Center). In that role she dealt extensively with children's art. She started and promoted literally hundreds of events and many programs. All the while, she was able to continue her own artistic work.

As the speaker for the Ellendale Area Arts Council's annual meeting (Jan. 25 at 10:00 AM), Lois will be speaking about her current driving passions: the use of the arts to facilitate health and well-being, particularly among populations that often find themselves cut off from the mainstream of arts culture. Senior citizens, she finds, can experience dramatic improvements in attitude and physical health through exposure to the arts. More recently, Lois has been taking the arts into prisons, giving inmates new ways to approach life and creativity. The results have been quite positive.

Lois has also promoted the arts as part of a teaching practice to prevent bullying in schools. Personal creativity, it turns out, has a way of brightening one's attitudes and promoting care between individuals. It has also been shown to be effective in reducing pain, easing recovery from traumatic brain injuries, and helping people deal with mental illnesses.



Lois noted that her work is not the same as "art therapy," which is more closely related to the medical field *per se*. It has more to do with connecting amateur and professional artists with people who can benefit from what they do and teach. And, of course, encouraging individuals to keep developing their creative abilities.

Lois' talk at the Annual Meeting will discuss some of the history behind these uses of the arts. The current wave of interest in such things is really a revival of an idea that was well understood in earlier generations. "it's an exciting field" she told the Leader, "and there's a lot going on in it."

The Ellendale Area Arts Council has been involved in this field for years, organizing the Art for Life program, which brings special events to the Prince of Peace Care Center on a regular basis. The general public is invited to these events as well.

The Arts Council Annual Meeting will be in the Woodland Room at the Fireside Restaurant January 25 at 10:00 and will last about 90 minutes. A light brunch will be given free of charge. Everyone interested in the arts is more than welcome to attend.

By Ken Smith

"John, could you turn down the heater?" A young passenger seated about halfway back on the bus is too warm. "Yes ma'am," the driver responds immediately, reaching for the control panel at his left. "I didn't think" he adds, "that I'd hear anybody ask for the heat to be turned down on a day like today. Let it never be said that I let my kids get cold."

The outside temperature hovers around zero, and the horizon is covered with a fresh sheet of snow. The sun has almost risen over the horizon and is glinting against frosty fields and tree fences and the white-laced windows of John Beckius' 47-passenger school bus. A little while later, one of the passengers asks, "John, can you turn the back lights off? "Yes" he answers immediately, and the lights switch off. It's a few weeks before Christmas, and there's a good spirit on the bus.

John Beckius drives the longest of the four routes that deliver rural kids to and from the Ellendale Public School. The route takes him from his farm northwest of town out to the foot of the Couetea hills (and sometimes into the hills), back past Merricourt, down, through Monango and points east, then south again with eastward and westward jaunts. This year, one less pick-up has shortened the nearly 90-mile course he drove nearly every school day last year. He starts early. He has to be on the road by 6:45 AM. Most of his route is on gravel, and there are stretches of harsh washboard. "Some of these roads are absolutely horrible," he says, which is why he's set a schedule consistent driving only 45-miles per hour off the pavement. But he does enjoy looking at the landscape he loves.

The families on the route know just when to expect the bus. "I know my route intimately," John says. Specifying an exact time "eliminates the possibility of that age-old excuse of kids why they are late, and they always say 'well I couldn't see the bus through the trees.'" All concerned know, of course, that delays and complications will sometimes throw the route off schedule. Regardless, John says, pointing to his watch, "they need to be looking at the right thing. If I say 7:39, they better be out there at 7:39. That's just the way I do it."

Politeness and safety are two main watchwords on John's bus. He greets each rider by name as they step on board, and they greet him back. The process repeats when the kids step off the bus in front of the school. In between, John does anything he can to help his passengers have a good ride, and build the family atmosphere. Sometimes he tells them jokes or gives them an interesting story about his own experiences. Once in awhile he'll throw in a tall tale that makes the younger kids' eyes big. The older kids know him well enough to tell when he's teasing, but they don't seem to mind. For more entertainment, the bus has a good radio, with speakers all the way back. "The kids have their favorite radio stations" John says. Recently, their preference has been for Big Dog Country 95.5 from Jamestown or Q 101, a pop station from Valley City. "Yeah, I kind of spoil my kids," he says. "Once a week I'll give them cookies. They all know the program. I just keep the box up in the cupboard, and I give it to one of the kids. They'll hand them out themselves, so I don't even have to mess with it."

Driving kids and making music are two of John's main loves. He's been an accordion player for decades, and he collects instruments. He plays at events nearly every chance he gets. Two days before his interview with the Leader, He declined a well-paying extracurricular trip so he could play at the Prince of Peace annual Christmas Bazaar. He's also got many decades of driving experience. His years with school busses started in 1985, but 18 years earlier he started driving big passenger busses for Star Lines in Nebraska. "I had quite a route," he recalls. "It was based out of Scottsbluff. I kept the bus at Chadron overnight in their service bay." In 1980 he married Ellendale native Marsha Zinter, who, John notes fondly was the first baby born in Ellendale's Memorial Hospital, in June 1953. The couple settled northwest of Ellendale in 1989, enjoying farm life and staying active in the community and



church life. When Marsha passed away in 2010, John found solace in his many friendships, in the countryside, and his music. And, of course, in service to the many hundreds of passengers he has served faithfully for so long.

The bus goes over a big pillow drift and shudders gently. Rough spots and washboards shake the big vehicle quite a bit, but it keeps a firm, solid feel. "One day," he recalls, "the kids asked me how come this bus don't have seat belts? Why do you have that one on and we don't?" His answer was typically humorous. "Well," he responded with a chuckle, "that must mean I'm the only idiot on the bus." The youngsters know that's only a joke. Driving a school bus requires a high level of intelligence and attentiveness, and John has plenty of both. Also, riding on a modern bus is statistically very safe, much safer than riding in an automobile. The high padded seat backs are designed with collisions in mind. Moreover, seat belts, which have been introduced by some districts around the country, introduce their own set of safety issues.

North Dakota school bus drivers are required to have extensive and regular safety training, and it's something John takes very seriously. He pays attention to small details, always alert. Most of all, he worries about careless drivers. Some years ago a semi nearly smashed into his bus at a pick-up stop on Highway 11. The semi driver slammed on his brakes, raising a big cloud of smoke, but couldn't stop in time. "He swerved into the other lane," and then his semi jackknifed, stopping right at the back of the bus. It happened at 8:00, John remembers, "but at 12:30 my knees were still knocking." Safety training nowadays, says John, no longer refers to "accidents." Instead they are called crashes. "If a person is paying attention to their driving, and driving the way they are supposed to drive," John insists, "there's no excuse for a wreck." As it turned out, the semi driver in this particular event was texting while driving.

After saying goodbye to his passengers John headed his bus back to his farm northwest of town. All the while sharing warm parts of the memory quilt he's built up over the decades. Driving past a farm a few miles north of town, and looking out at the ice and snow brought to mind a memory shared a few years ago by a man who grew up nearby. John Wheelihan, who is now 102, went to a country school through the 8th grade, and enrolled at Ellendale High School in the 1930s, before bus service existed. "Getting through high school in those years," John recalled, "was tough, if you lived in the country. You either had to stay in town or drive or ride a horse or something. I've come in a wagon and I've come in on skis, and in that car I had. We had hot water for anti-freeze. My dad and I, we'd take hot water down to the garage and get it started in the morning, and then I'd drive in and I'd drain it and at night I'd go down into the boiler room and get some more hot water, start it, drive it home, then drain it. That was tough going."

Life is quite different now, and better in many ways. Today's rural families, served by a faithful corps of drivers with modern busses, have much for which to be thankful. See article to the left for a word from Superintendent Michael Kaiser on our bus drivers and all of the people that work together to serve our youngsters at the Ellendale Public School.

Arts Council is Bringing Barn Quilt Art Class January 25th

By Ken Smith

"I love the precise nature of this craft. When you pull up the tape and see that perfect straight line and the matching points, it's really satisfying!"

Karin Baker, whose home is in the James River Valley near the little town of Dickey, enjoys rural life. And she loves using art to make it more interesting. "Barn quilts" are one way she expresses this love. On January 25, at the Opera House, starting at 1:00 PM, Karin will hold a workshop in which each participant will be provided with the materials and the guidance to create their own unique finished barn quilt, which they will take home. Karin notes that these quilts can be displayed in many ways, on homes, garages, driveways, or even indoors. One doesn't need a barn to participate. Barn quilts also make good gifts.

There is some evidence that "barn quilts" were used at farmsteads in pre-Civil War days to mark the locations of safe houses on the Underground Railroad. The modern

versions, though, date to 2001, when Donna Sue Groves of Adams County, Ohio wanted to honor her mother by hanging a painted quilt on her barn. The idea seemed odd, but her friends encouraged her. Then they expanded the idea. Why not, they suggested, put quilts on a number of barns along scenic byways of their rural area, and encourage people to drive these routes as a form of recreation? And so, the first "barn quilt trail" was born.

The idea has been spreading. Nelson County (west of Grand Forks County) is home to North Dakota's first barn quilt trail. The North Dakota Tour-



ism Bureau (www.bit.ly/ndquilt) officially recognizes the trail. Though the trails are still uncommon, www.barnquiltinfo.com says that individual barn quilts can now be

found in every state as well as the provinces of Canada. That's good progress for an art form that's been around for less than two decades.

Karin's mentor in barn quilting was Cynthia Buchholz from Bittersweet Barnquilt Company in Hutchinson, Minnesota. Karin learned fast. Making the quilts is relatively simple, once one understands the process. And as anyone who has ever handled a child's kaleidoscope knows, the pattern possibilities are endless. Karin would like to see more people making and displaying this form of art. She is hoping to organize an officially recognized quilt trail along the Chan SanSan Scenic Byway, which stretches through the Red River Valley from Jamestown to LaMoure.

One can already see several examples of the art along that route, including several that Karin Made. One of them is a 4' x 4' quilt

that was donated to the Byway and is on display at their kiosk near Adrian. Karin also admires the quilts displayed at the Tony and Amy Roorda farm near Ypsilanti, northeast of Dickey. The Roordas have hung 9 large quilts on their haybarn, giving passersby a nice visual treat.

The workshop will be at the Ellendale Opera House January 25 at 1:00. Karin will also be attending and presenting briefly at the Arts Council's annual meeting (free and open to the public, light brunch included) at 10:00 at the Fireside the same day.

To encourage greater participation in the workshop, the Ellendale Area Arts Council is subsidizing a portion of each participant's fee. The normal cost would be \$70.00, including all instruction and all the materials to make a lovely quilt to take home the same day. But for this event, the cost per person will only be \$50.00. Registrations are due Jan. 18. To register or get more information, contact Lana Schlecht at warlan@drtel.net, or call her at 701-261-3320.